



DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE FACT SHEET

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Americans Deserve Guaranteed Access to Specialty Care

Access to Specialty Care: Access to quality specialty care can be a matter of life and death. When the American people say they support managed care reform, access to specialty care is one of the key concerns they have in mind. Many of the tragic cases we have heard about are the result of delay or denial of access to cardiologists, oncologists, surgeons, pediatric specialists and others. Furthermore, access to specialists, combined with a right to a meaningful and speedy independent appeal, will help minimize the need for litigation by helping to ensure patients get the health care they need from qualified providers in a timely fashion.

Talking Points:

- Democrats believe patients should not be subjected to the one-size-fits-all brand of health care practiced by many HMOs, and that patients with special conditions must have access to providers who have the expertise to treat their problems.
- Access to needed specialists should be a basic provision in a *Patients' Bill of Rights*. Key elements to ensuring access to specialists include:
 - allowing enrollees to go out of the plan's network for specialty care (at no extra cost to the enrollee) if there is no appropriate, qualified provider available in the network; and
 - allowing individuals who are seriously ill or require continued care by a specialist to have their specialist coordinate their care and not be required to ask permission from a primary care provider for each visit.

Democratic Policy Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510-7050

Tom Daschle, Chairman
Byron Dorgan, Co-Chairman

- The Republican bill does not ensure access to specialty care—it lacks basic protections to ensure that patients can see doctors qualified to treat their condition. For example, if a child with cancer needs access to a pediatric oncologist, there is no guarantee in the Republican bill that she will have access to that specialist.
- The Republican bill does not allow patients with diseases or disabilities requiring continuing care by a specialist to designate their specialist as their primary care doctor who can coordinate their care.
- Under the Republican bill, patients could be charged more for out-of-network specialty care—even if the plan is at fault for not having access to appropriate specialists.
- The Republican bill would not allow patients to appeal a denial of access to a specialist to an independent reviewer.
- Children and adults with such diseases as cancer or severe arthritis will continue to face insurance company red tape when they want to see an oncologist or rheumatologist.
- While Republicans claim that their bill provides access to specialists, it fails to include the protections that most Americans need.
- **S. 6**, the *Democratic Patients' Bill of Rights*, ensures that patients will have access to the care they need.

Our opponents will say that their bill includes access to specialty care. But the fact is that their bill leaves out the key elements needed to ensure access to specialty care. Again, they are using the title without the substance.

Our opponents say specialists are not trained to be—nor do they want to be—primary care providers.

- Let's be clear—our bill does not *force* specialists to be primary care providers. We are interested in a guarantee that patients with complex medical needs will be able to have the appropriate specialist act as a care coordinator. Specialists should not have to go through the HMO gatekeeper for each referral to another specialist or for tests or other treatment needed to diagnose, heal or prevent deterioration of their patient's health.